

Christ Church Elbow Park Archives

**Interview with Pat Burns, Katie Valentine, Suzanne Devonshire
Baker and Kathy Chapman**

Christ Church Elbow Park Oral History Project 2020

Interviewer: Shari Peyerl

15 September 2020

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Zoom Interview

Transcript of Pat Burns, Katie Valentine, Suzanne Devonshire Baker and Kathy Chapman

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Interviewed by Shari Peyerl

Shari Peyerl, Interviewer (Christ Church Archivist)

Pat Burns, Narrator

Katie Valentine, Narrator

Suzanne Devonshire Baker, Narrator

Kathy Chapman, Narrator

Shari Peyerl: This interview is being recorded for the Christ Church archives and will be made available to researchers. You will be given a transcript of the recording, and will have the opportunity to review it and reconsider any portions at that time.

Christ Church has several lovely landscaped areas: the North Garden, the Memorial Garden, and the Labyrinth Garden, and I'm hoping we can touch on these today. I'd like to begin with each of you stating your name and please tell us how long you've been at Christ Church and your role in the landscaping.

Pat Burns: I've been a member of Christ Church on and off since I was very young. I became interested in the garden in about the year 2000. I was on the vestry at that time. I finally came up with some notes for the annual Memorial Garden meetings. We planted that garden in May on Mother's Day 2008.

Katie Valentine: I joined Christ Church when I married Fred in 1965. We were in Calgary for a year, moved to Toronto for 12 years, and returned in 1978. I became interested in doing something with flowers and the church garden in about 1986 or 1987. I was involved with the seniors' program at the time with Paula O'Driscoll, and both of us love gardening. It was then that we talked about improving the appearance and enhancing the gardens of the church.

In those days, the gardens beds were very drab looking, sparsely planted with a few bushes but no flowers. There were some evergreens and some potentilla along the west side of the extension to the main body of the church, and some evergreens, at the front of the church. We thought maybe flowers would help. In those days, the beds were narrow, and there really was little room for flowers in those beds, so we talked about buying some planters.

We went to the garden center and bought about four half-barrel tubs and put them along the south side of the church where the Loggia is now. In those days, it was not enclosed. Then, we bought two more of these tubs for the west side of the church to be placed on either side of the main front doors. We planted these with annuals and took care of them ourselves for about three years. Later, Marie Anne White took over the watering and planting. She may have had other helpers. My duties ended after about three years, in 1990.

Suzanne Devonshire Baker: I've gone to Christ Church my whole life. My parents and my grandparents all went to Christ Church. I didn't get involved with the gardens until I think about 2006. We had entered the Horticultural Society Competition in 2005. Pat and John Burns came to our yard. I knew them from Christ Church, but they asked if I would help with the new plants for the Memorial Garden. I put the sketch together.

Pat and John asked me what grows the best in this little sub-climate we have in Elbow Park valley. I suggested some of my favorite plants in the garden. Then, of course, Pat and John added in theirs and we came up with this little sketch. I remember it was Mother's Day because one of my daughters was engaged and she brought her fiancé. They helped us plant, as did our youngest daughter. It was my Mother's Day gift from my daughters. One of my dear friends, Linda Shaw, also helped.

Kathy Chapman: I have been at Christ Church for 38 years. I was spearheading a centennial project - a labyrinth. There was discussion about having a community garden as one of the proposed projects. When that was unsuccessful, it was proposed that the Labyrinth be built within a Tranquility/Serenity Garden. While the initial proposal was in September 2011, we first met with the Aura Landscapers in February of 2012. He sent us a drawing within a couple of months, but the final one is dated April 24th, 2013.

We also had two artist renderings done by April Viczko of our parish. She did them from a south and a north-facing perspective. It's so interesting because in the end, the landscape design and the artist renderings are very similar.

Pat: We had discussions about the garden design, which went from a very formal English gated garden with wrought-iron fence, but that didn't necessarily match the look of the exterior of the church. It grew into a more relaxed, tranquil, and contemplative setting. And that is what we were after.

Katie: I think when we were thinking about flowers, we wanted them to be bright and cheerful for weddings, while also enhancing the general atmosphere of the garden. It was just the very beginning of color. Everything was green before.

Suzanne: The trick with a perennial garden, of course, is to get a balance of color throughout the season and throughout the garden. That's the art of a perennial garden.

Kathy: While colour was important, our initial intent indicated that, "We were looking for a place of restfulness, inviting balance of openness." We did not want to take away from the Memorial Garden because it was already in full blossom and had been for several years, but we wanted to compliment it in some way.

We were also looking for low maintenance and low water requirements. Watering was a huge issue, and we were being asked to minimize upkeep costs. We were looking at drought-resistant native plants, and grasses, and rocks. We even discussed xeriscaping and a balance of scale between height and softening and complimenting the symmetrical lines of the Labyrinth. We talked about native plants and even thought of an herb garden. Its fragrances would add to the environment of contemplation and restfulness.

While there were roses in the Memorial Garden, originally, we didn't have plans for flowers in the Tranquility Garden. However, the revised design included Thérèse Bugnet rose bushes and Dancing Butterfly peonies.

Shari: For the Serenity Garden, you wanted the restfulness and you wanted to compliment what was already there. I'm going to shift back to what was already in the Memorial Garden. Katie said that she really wanted to bring color in for weddings. Suzanne, when you were doing the seasonal plantings for the Memorial Garden, and thinking about the shifting of color through time with the seasons, was there an aim to have a variety of color or particular colors, specific colors?

Suzanne: There is more to a perennial garden than a variety of colors. There has to be an equal level of color in all areas of the garden throughout the growing season. This is the whole trick behind good perennial gardens.

Shari. Do the colors in the garden have any symbolic meaning?

Suzanne: I really wish I could say they did, but we weren't that sophisticated, were we?

Pat: No, but that would have been a good idea.

Shari. When you were choosing the plants and you were aiming for the seasonality and the variety of color, did you have a particular pattern in mind?

Suzanne: I think that in any garden with two or three sides, one would like to have the bounce from this color to that color over there. If you had snow-in-summer here, you'd have the same

amount of snow-in-summer on the other side(s), so you'd have the white and the white and the white. You want it to be almost like music, a staccato that plays throughout. From that point, yes. We were concerned about color. We had blue salvia here, we would have blue salvia there, and blue salvia over there, so that you would have that visual movement.

Pat: I was down there yesterday looking at everything and checking out the names of the plants and so on. I realized at that time when you're concentrating solely on that garden without other distractions, it is very well-balanced. We have a Wichita Juniper in each corner. There were three to cover the utility box which we were frightened to death about.

Anyway, when you look at it overall, it is very well-balanced. The color is strictly Suzanne's doing. When you're taking in the whole garden there is balance, a flow, and a musicality, but not without some work. I've been working in the garden this summer, and I've noticed that there's always something blooming. The colors are balanced throughout the garden, throughout the summer season and into the fall.

Shari: Can we talk about the maintenance of the gardens? How is it handled?

Pat: We had professional maintenance people as well, in the beginning, and quite a healthy budget. We also had several groups that came in over several years to do the maintenance. They included John and Pat Burns and Suzanne and a bunch of others who did little bits here and there. We were really very lucky to have had this group that came in, at least once every two weeks. Others followed. The irrigation system in the Memorial Garden also has helped.

Katie: Bruce Duplessis, Jacky [Jacqueline is known to her friends as Jacky] Bashford, and Dennis Laughton are really the mainstays of maintenance today.

Kathy: Even though the Labyrinth Garden was low maintenance, Jacky found that there was no way she could tend to it by herself. Last year was the first year the Labyrinth Committee was called upon to care for its gardens. There were about six of us on that committee who volunteer for that. Jacky and Bruce gave us directions of what needed to be done. We did a major overhaul last year in several hours to catch up with the work that hadn't been done for the last three or four years. The landscaper actually came back to replace the plants that hadn't made it through the winter. Our initial plan was not to have the need for watering. However, there was an irrigation system installed and that has helped the plants to thrive.

Shari: You've mentioned that things are evolving. Does anybody want to talk a bit about how things have changed? It sounds like you don't have enough volunteers to come in and do maintenance. Are there other things that cause changes in the gardens?

Suzanne: The perennial garden is interesting because people have added their own touch to it, and you will find that people have, over the years, taken bits of perennials and replaced them with different ones. Every perennial garden needs to be thinned out once in a while. I know other people have also added things to it, too.

Katie: We had been given donations that have contributed greatly to the garden. One example is the beautiful deep purple irises that Elizabeth Brain gave us, located along the south side of the church. A garden is meant to evolve. We have quite a few volunteers now and this is good. The more people that come into it and want to help, the better. This is very positive.

Suzanne: I know I asked Drina Barton if she would donate some lily bulbs, that they used to sell very reasonably at the country club. We planted a lot of those in the Memorial Garden.

Shari: Where did the plants come from? I know you've had some landscapers, but I'm also interested in donations.

Suzanne: Originally, it was John and Pat. We made the list from my crazy little sketch. John and Pat bought them or ordered them all from a nursery.

Pat: Yes, they were very healthy. They came from a long-time nursery near Balzac. We got a lot of perennials from them, plus the trees. They were very helpful, gave us a pretty good discount and delivered.

David Evans was responsible for getting us extra ultra soil to be brought in for the gardens. That made a huge difference. Suzanne, I think that I would say that more than half of the plants identified in your original drawing are there now.

The Memorial central bed is not as detailed in the drawings, so there are fewer of the planned perennials there. At the door of the Crump Room, are the peonies donated by Mary Brown, in memory of Mary Lavender. They were two lovely ladies who had a lot to do with the church. Other peonies have also been added over time.

Kathy: Most of our plants for the Tranquility Garden were brought in by the landscaper, and I'm not certain where he sourced them. Our landscaper also brought in the rock from BC. Someone offered to donate the Standing Stone and I believe the landscaper found that stone after he knew what the donor wanted. It's very similar to what was in the artist's rendering. The standing stone is the one you see looking straight through the center of the Labyrinth. The stones are meant to give perspective to the garden and to create a container to surround and hold the labyrinth. Also, they're functional. People can sit on those stones and they do use them as "benches".

Shari: Were you looking for a particular type of stone or a particular shape?

Kathy: No, the landscaper went on his original drawing. He knew where he wanted to get them from, and he knew what he thought would look good. The stone as you walk between the two gardens that's just off to the right actually was donated by a long-time parishioner, Mary Brown. It came from her garden, a block away from the church.

Shari: Are the donated plants and stone, mostly native or from other countries or provinces?

Kathy: The plants are largely native. That was the original idea for that garden; there's caragana, good prairie grasses, and bushes.

The church had been looking for a use of that space. Over the years, there had been many proposed uses, one of which was a parking lot. In the fall of 2011, the congregation was asked to consider possible centennial projects, and someone proposed a labyrinth. The labyrinth is used as a meditative walking prayer.

At the time, I had just completed a labyrinth facilitator training course in Chartres, France. (The Labyrinth in the Tranquility Garden is a modified version of the labyrinth found in the Chartres Cathedral.)

We continued talking to the congregation about what that could look like and why and how the labyrinth would be of benefit to Christ Church. My son provided us with a graphic of a labyrinth and was able to produce a drawing of it. He then did a mock up visual and placed the graphic in the area it now stands. We marked it out on the lawn with chalk. There was a sense that the labyrinth on its own was incomplete. That's when I started reflecting with our Labyrinth Committee. "We need something else here. If we just plunk it in, it will not work. We need to soften the space. We need something else to make it a very special place."

Of course, we realized that not everybody's going to want to walk the Labyrinth. "What can we provide for those people that won't want to walk it?" That's when we felt that we needed to also have a place where people could just come and sit. We realized then, that the labyrinth needed a container, a sacred space of its own that would house it and could be a place of serenity, meditation and contemplation. It would fit with and be another link to the Memorial Garden.

Shari: Are there other activities?

Kathy: I knew that some people did get married on labyrinths, but I didn't know if people would choose to use this space, but they have, especially for photos before and after weddings. It has been used for memorial services and has been used for a variety of church services: e.g. the preparation for Ash Wednesday, the Stations of the Cross during Lent, lighting the fire for the Easter vigil, on Christmas Eve to walk the story of the nativity. The labyrinth was completed at the time of the flood and was walked by the community as a time of healing.

Suzanne: I'd just like to add that the brick walkway is a wonderful transition between the two gardens. I don't know who developed that or whose idea it was, but the pathway is a lovely design element.

Kathy: That was the intent. How do we connect with the church? How do we celebrate the centennial? We felt it was a way to do both of those things.

Suzanne: It's a lovely symbolic transition.

Kathy: I see many people sitting. When I'm walking the Labyrinth, I see many people come and sit on the benches at the Memorial Gardens. It serves a purpose — I can't name what that is for people, but it's lovely to see.

Pat: I think it's a reflection. I think people sit there to meditate, to contemplate as well as visit whomever in the garden. It connects with the Labyrinth as well and is being used as more than a place to eat lunch. It all flows together. Maybe God was looking after us.

Shari: Do you see any other examples of non-parishioners using these spaces?

Kathy: Yes. There's probably more community people that walk that Labyrinth than our own parishioners. Moms with children visit it. They may not know what it is, but it's definitely a spot where they stop and visit while the children race and play. It was meant to be a gift to the community. We hoped that it would bring people there that maybe wouldn't come to church. People have shared: "On my way home from work, I stop there;" "I walk that Labyrinth at least three times a week." It's definitely being used by the community.

We did have a community group that trained young adults with disabilities. They brought a group here for two to three years every Wednesday. They walked the Labyrinth, spent some time upstairs in the classrooms and then they would walk the Labyrinth again. That was awesome community outreach.

Shari: Do you have people stopping in the gardens who just want to know about its practical aspects? Do you find people coming to the gardens not realizing that it's a Memorial Garden or what the Labyrinth is for?

Pat: Yes, people just walking by are quite taken with it. They don't know anything about it but they're happy to stop and ask.

Kathy: Yes, "What is that? What are you doing?" I think this was even more true when we were building it. People were probably more intentional about asking. If you're walking, people don't know whether they should interrupt you or not, but you can sense their curiosity.

Shari: You're all involved in different aspects of the gardens and have been on committees that are choosing plants. When you're talking about the gardens to each other, do you use the common names or the Latin names?

Suzanne: I think that we used the common names at the time we started although I'd just gone through this horticultural competition. I was certainly aware of the Latin names, but we used the common names. We chose some plants for color and seasonal blooming, and others for their hardiness and their ability to be long-lasting. I was relieved to hear Pat say that 12 or 14 years later they're still there. Perennials don't last forever. We must have done pretty well to have that many still there.

Pat: Don't you think in a way that in general people will refer to some plants by their Latin name just out of habit or hearsay, but it's not really deliberately looking for the Latin name? I know some of them are Euphorbia or a Spurge or Salvia. Some of them just jump to your mouth quickly, but not all of them. For instance, we were having trouble identifying a plant in the middle bed, and it's an anemone. That's not necessarily Latin, but it's from the same family as the crocus. Or it's a pasque flower.

Kathy: Our landscaper used common names in that list I sent you. I think he knew we weren't really gardeners.

Shari: You had mentioned earlier that you had discussed using a very formal English garden for the Memorial Garden, but that you'd opted for something that was more casual in the design, without a gate to welcome the community in. Would you characterize the Memorial Garden now as being English in any way or Anglican in any way?

Suzanne: That's a very good question. It is really an English garden. It's just a more romantic, less formal style. Whether that's Anglican or not, I don't know, but it's an interesting question.

Shari: Kathy, it sounds like Labyrinths are not restricted to a particular cultural group either?

Kathy: No, they exist on every continent and have existed for hundreds and thousands of years. In their current form, their origins are twenty to thirty years old, but they have been in the floors of churches since 1200 AD. Before that, they were found as petroglyphs and in tiles and mosaics all over the world. They are walked by all cultures in some form or another.

Shari: The gardens then are not only broad to the community, but broad to time and stretching over different spaces and continents. They have brought the world here and taken the church out into the community, as well.

Pat: I was just going to add that we are Canadians here. Canadians are made up of many, many nationalities. Maybe these gardens are an expression of all of these cultures, evidencing a bit of influence from each one.